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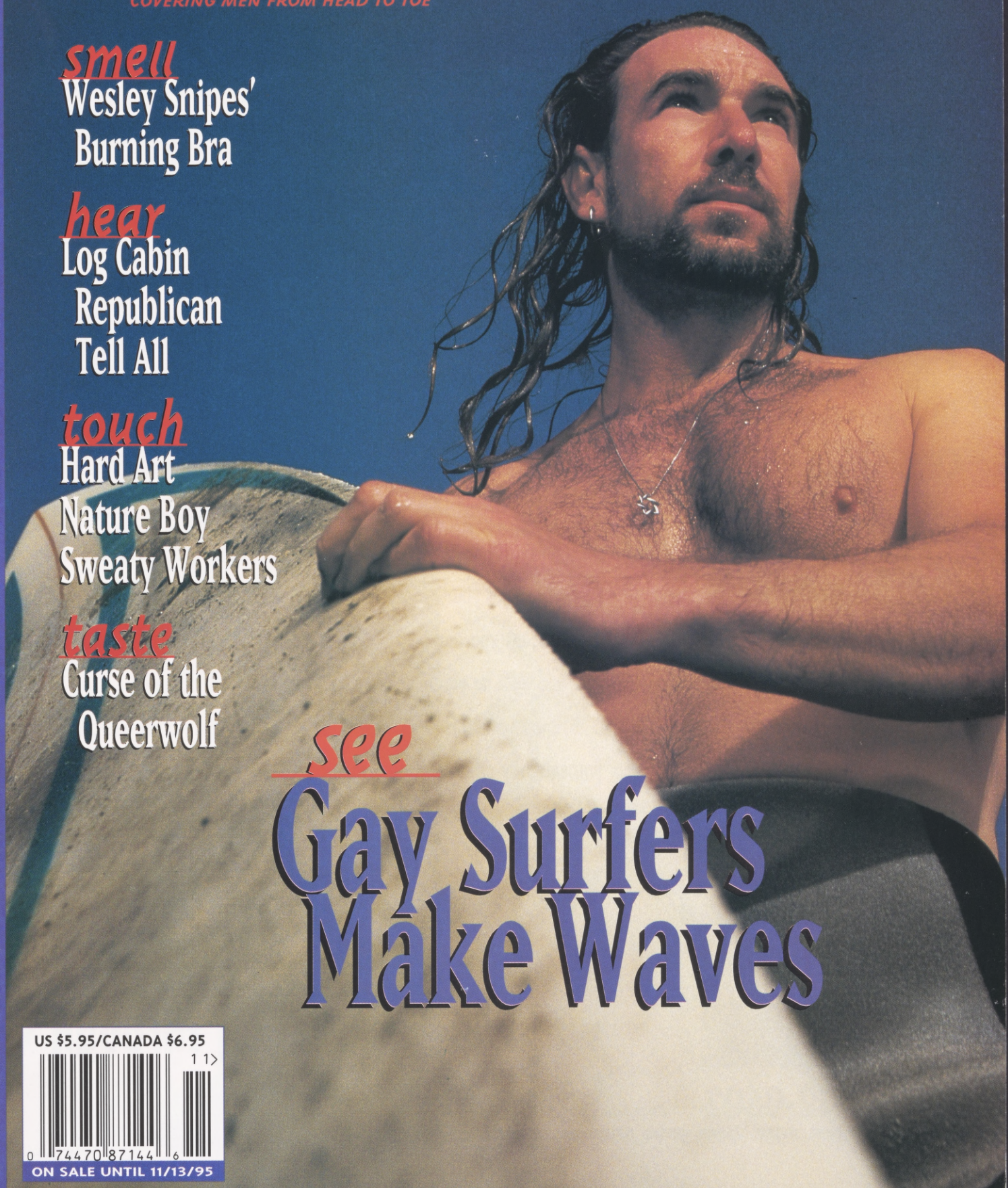

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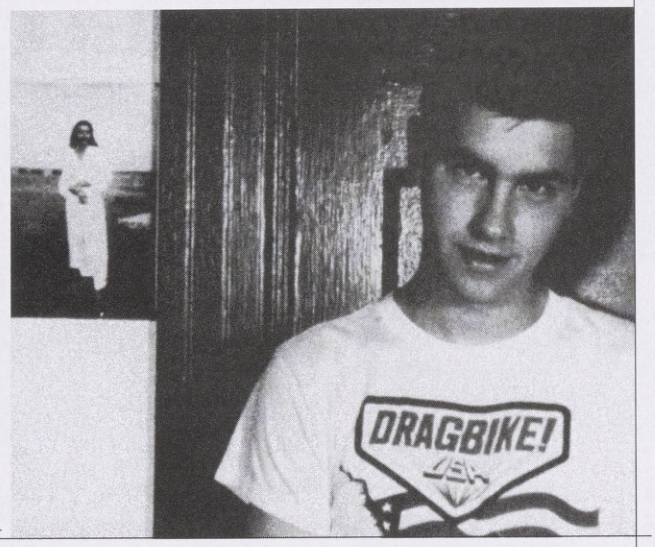

photo: Michael Wallen

No Thanks, We're Vegans: A scene from Michael Wallin's Black Sheep Boy, *which PBS found too meaty to swallow.*

continued from page 12

genre, *You're the Top*, has Lili Taylor *(Shortcuts, Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle)* penciled in as a dowdy lesbian whose girlfriend yearns for wilder action.

Boo, Boo for Old Notre Dame: Jill Godmilow made a film of *Roy Cohn/Jack Smith*, the late Ron Vawter's one man-show about wheeler-dealer Cohn and film/performance artist Smith. These radically different gay icons both died of AIDS. Godmilow, who teaches at the University of Notre Dame, caused a stir when she announced a fall benefit screening for the campus gay group, which lacks official university status (chalk it up to a "lifestyle clash"). "Nobody would ever tell me I can't show my own work, but I suffered pressure not to make it a benefit," Godmilow told QSP. And the film omitted Vawter's hilarious bits about New York's late Francis Cardinal "Kitty" Spellman.

A 'Curious' Compromise was struck whereby the *Roy Cohn* screening benefits the gay group but also Campus Ministry, for what the fortunately tenured Godmilow describes with a droll roll of the eyes as the Ministry's "struggle against homophobia...Of course they do no such thing, but in some ways this commits them to it. I'm pleased with the compromise because it is educational in its own curious, ironic way and allows us to raise the subject of homophobia yet again." Here's hoping the hubbub propels UND out of "hate the sin, not the sinner" mode.

A Lesson for Filmmakers Everywhere: One of the best shorts making the '95 gay film-fest circuit is Michael Wallin's *Black Sheep Boy*, which the forty-something director describes as being "about the pleasures and pitfalls of being attracted to much younger men." In an apparently giddy moment in 1993, the Independent Television Service (ITVS) green-lighted the project. The filmmaker always assumed there'd be a more explicit "director's cut" and a TV version, but didn't want to censor himself in advance, so he submitted the racier one to see what would and wouldn't float.

Breach of Contract: ITVS flipped out over the rough cut and declared Wallin in breach of contract. He then recut *BSB* into what he calls "a G-rated *Mary Poppins* version, which I felt was in total compliance with their concerns: 'no nudity below the waist and no profanity.'" The plug was pulled anyway. ITVS, which is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, was created to "encourage the development of programming that involves creative risk." It has a proven track record of support for gay work, but has been accused of embracing challenging projects and then backing away or otherwise not getting them into the public TV mainstream. This seems redundant: Don't we already have PBS to do this?

Standards Weren't Met? ITVS director of production David Liu said that *Black Sheep Boy* was dropped because it didn't meet PBS's broadcast standards (they've shown worse), wasn't experimental enough (when's the last time anyone complained about *that*) and didn't engage its subject matter intellectually (don't agree). "It boiled down to the matter of craft," Liu said. "It's very explicit, but that's not the problem. Michael said in his proposal he wanted to get away from stereotypical portrayals, to correct the unbalanced and stereotyped portrayal of gay male sexuality. Don't you think *Black Sheep Boy* stereotypes gay men?"

Desire Under the Helms: No, *Black Sheep Boy* doesn't stereotype gay men. Wallin presents a thinking, feeling human being who's seeking self-knowledge—hardly the activities of a stereotype. Artistically, *BSB* has links to experimental classics such as Jean Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour* and Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* but addresses the philosophical and psychological implications of desire more directly. Wallin's film repeats itself near the end, but is a unique document nonetheless. Yes, it would have brought some heat from Jesse Helms and those out to scuttle publicly financed art, but since that is obvious from the proposal, why fund it in the first place?

So Was Explicitness a Problem or Not? "Its being explicit isn't really the question," Liu maintained, but then a moment later said, "Basically, a lot of stations wouldn't carry nudity. All Michael dealt with [in the 'G-rated' version] was cutting out blatantly genital shots. There are other nude shots. It merely was an excised version and that wasn't the real problem. That was part of the problem. If the rest of it was really wonderful and rare it wouldn't have been [a problem] ... but the nudity is a separate question." OK, so the explicitness wasn't, was or was partly a problem. Or a separate question altogether. (Sounds like it was a problem.) ✸

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Hey Michael!

I must let you know first that the series was a tremendous success. It was completely sold out and I had to turn away about 40 people. So thank you for participating. While I figured that the majority of our audience might have seen Black Sheep Boy in 1995's outfest... I found that the majority were introduced to it at the Alternative Screen. Anyway, as I've said, my many thanks to you. I've included all the mentions of the series here... the L.A. weekly review focused on Vintage to help sell tickets to program one. Also, gulp, one of the reviews of Boy just incorporated that troubling write up (press release...) of Margot's. my apologies again. I guess I should try and control other departments work a bit more, thereby controlling a certain number of lazy press people! Anyway, Kevins sumation is great... I wish he had used more superlatives but it is flattering to have short film work written on by one of the country's most powerful critics in any respect. It does bring attention to your work, and Kevin only mentioned the work he wanted to praise.
At any rate, my special praise to you and to the excellence of your work.

P.S. When I get your tapes I'll move them Sundance's way.

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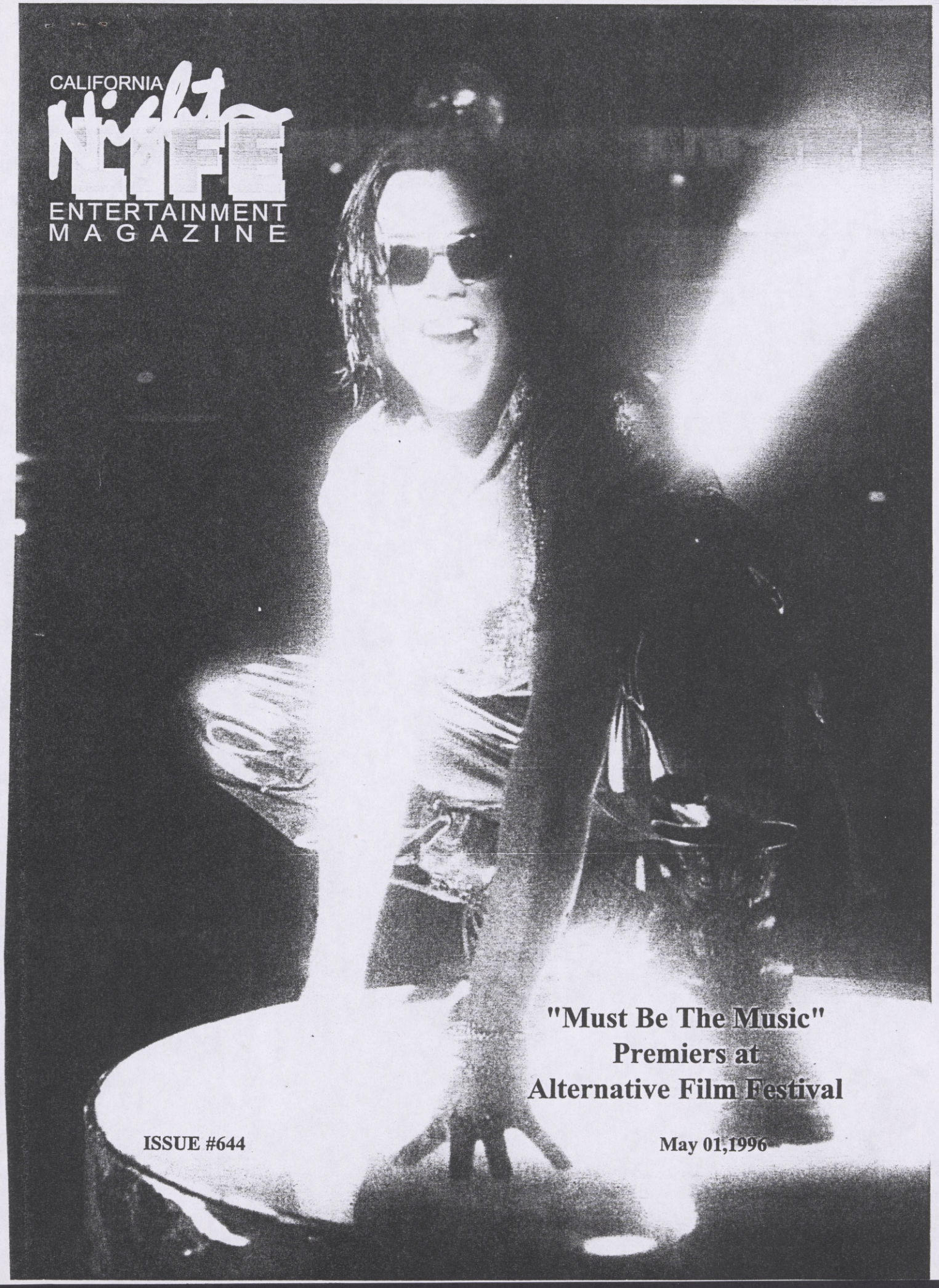


CALIFORNIA Night LIFE
ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

"Must Be The Music" Premiers at Alternative Film Festival

ISSUE #644

May 01,1996

CALIFORNIA Night LIFE
CALIFORNIA NIGHTLIFE IS

MAY 1, 1996

Scenes from: "Black Sheep Boy"

"Cheap Flight"

COVER STORY

AMERICAN CINEMATHEQUE

THE ALTERNATIVE SCREEN

GAY & LESBIAN CINEMA

In association with GLAAD, the American Cinematheque's THE ALTERNATIVE SCREEN: A FORUM FOR INDEPENDENT FILM EXHIBITION & BEYOND, presents an eclectic mix of gay and lesbian films One Night Only, Thursday, May 9 at the Raleigh Studios in the Charlie Chaplin Theatre, 5300 Melrose Ave., in Hollywood.

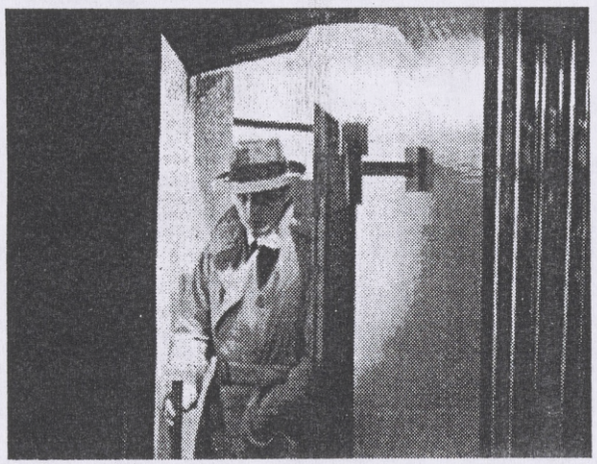
A program of short films begins at 9:15 p.m.

Nikolas Perry's "MUST BE THE MUSIC" (1995 19min.) follows four young men (three gay and one hetero) who descend on a Hollywood nightclub with great anticipation. In addition to the many shorts, the 1994 Academy Award-winner "Trevor" will be shown. Closing the evening will be Joshua Rosenzweig's "Teen Scream Teen," which stars Jackie Beat, Alexis Arquette and Robert Ring as three "teenage girls" determined to have fun at their Halloween slumber party, despite the terror of a lurking serial killer stalking chubby girls.

There will be a discussion secession with several of the directors as well as Jackie Beat following the program.

Thursday, May 9. For tickets, call THEATIX at (213) 466-1767. For further information only, call (213) 466-FILM.

SPECIAL EVENTS



Le Samouraï

PAID WITH A BULLET: THE FILMS OF JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE — LE SAMOURAÏ

Iconoclast Jean-Pierre Melville (né Grumbach) directed some dozen feature films, yet his mark on cinema reaches from apostle Jean-Luc Godard to John Woo. A war veteran (and fan of *Moby-Dick*) who founded his own production company in 1946, Melville's métier was the gangster film, a genre he all but reinvented with reserves of passion and an astonishing beautiful, austere aesthetic. (When compared favorably to Bresson, Melville responded, "I'm sorry, but it's Bresson who has always been Melvillan.") Part of an acclaimed mid-'60s trilogy that includes *Le Doulos* and *Le Deuxième Souffle*, *Le Samouraï* stars an icy Alain Delon as a Parisian hit man betrayed by his employers. A black-and-white film in color, with what seems like just 10 pages of dialogue, the story is a prose poem of silences and gestures interrupted by the occasional crack of a gun and whispery sigh. Of the 1967 masterpiece, Woo has said, "*Le Samouraï* is the closest thing to a perfect movie that I have ever seen. It is an amazingly pure and elegant film about a criminal who is facing death and coming to terms with a life devoted to violence — to inflicting death upon others. The picture has been a major influence on my own work, not only because of the story and the way it is shot, but also because it is a gangster film that is as→ much about the way a gangster thinks and feels as about the way he behaves." Adds the director, "To me, this is the most romantic attitude imaginable." This screening of the restored, subtitled film kicks off a four-weekend, partial retrospective of Melville's work — miss it at your peril. *(American Cinematheque at Raleigh Studios; Fri.-Sat., May 3-4. For more information call 213-466-FILM.)* (Manohla Dargis)

THE ALTERNATIVE SCREEN — EVENING OF GAY & LESBIAN CINEMA

There's a scene in *Vintage: Families of Value* where queer siblings Thomas Allen Harris (the documentary's director) and his younger brother, Lyle, are discussing reasons for not having seen their father in a long while. Lyle, full of snaps and attitude, finally blurts, "He'll kill me. I'm serious. I know he'll kill me. It'll be Marvin Gaye Syndrome." It's a moment whose humor, bleak as it is, springs from the pained certainty of truth. Awkward, needlessly and infuriatingly artsy at times, with a tendency toward fumbling too many emotionally and intellectually charged segments, *Vintage* is, by its end, a thoroughly and engrossing, moving examination of queer siblings in three African-American families. Filmed over the course of five years, the doc, which tackles AIDS, incest, domestic violence and a variety of familial legacies, leaps all over the place in terms of time, theme and resolution, while striking — and maintaining — a powerful groove midway through. Jay Rosenblatt's excellent *The Smell of Burning Ants* is a stringent examination of the brutal socialization of young males. Stock footage and a meaty, incisive voice-over flow together into a fiercely intelligent critique of the cruelty that is taught, inflicted and turned inward in the cause of creating — then mercilessly policing — conventional masculinity. Peggy Rajski's 1994 Academy Award winning short *Trevor* is also on this minifestival bill. *(Raleigh Studios, Chaplin Theater; Thurs., May 9. For more information, call 213-466-3456.)* (Ernest Hardy)

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Trevor, Vintage & Other Shorts, Films Screen May 9

On May 9, American Cinematheque's Alternative Screen: A Forum for Independent Film Exhibition & Beyond, in association with the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, presents an eclectic mix of gay shorts and films in Raleigh Studios' Charlie Chaplin Theater.

The program begins at 7pm with Thomas Allen Harris' experimentally composed documentary *Vintage: Families of Value* (72 minutes), which focuses on three sets of gay, black siblings over a five-year period. It is accompanied by Jay Rosenblatt's short film, *The Smell of Burning Ants* (21 min.), an abstract look at machismo and the socialization of boys.

At 9:15pm, a schedule of gay shorts film begins with Kevin Duffy's *cheap flight* (five min.), a bisexual "morning after"; Michael Wallin's *Black Sheep Boy* (37 min.), a poetic meditation on the attraction of some older men to young boys; Nikolas Perry's *Must Be the Music* (19 min.), which follows three gay and one straight guys' night at a Hollywood nightclub; Barbara Rose Michels' *Watching Her Sleep* (six min.), concerning a woman's fantasies about a mysterious woman at the supermarket; *Trevor* (see below), which sparked the Trevor Project, an anti-suicide campaign for gay teens supported by the likes of Jodie Foster, Martin Scorsese, Sting, and ICM; and closes with Joshua Rosenzweig's *Teen Scream Teen* (37 min.), starring Jackie Beat, Alexis Arquette, and Robert Ring as three teenage girls holding a Halloween slumber party despite the terror of a lurking serial killer stalking chubby girls (Jackie, watch out!).

Directors Harris, Duffy, Michels, Perry, and Rosenzweig; producer Peter Spears; and Beat will appear for discussion following the screenings of their individual films.

Of particular note in this special program is Peggy Rajiksy's 1994 Academy Award-winning short *Trevor*, a touching 18 minutes of such poignancy, that hit so close to home, that it should be mandatory viewing for everyone, straight and gay. Told narratively as diary entries, the little-short-that-could follows 13-year-old Trevor (wonderfully played by Brett Barsky), a passionate Diana Ross fan who strives for attention from his parents by faking suicides. To no avail. To his delight, Trevor is befriended by a hunky school athlete named Pinky (Jonah Rooney), upon whom he develops a crush. When he confesses how he feels about Pinky to his best friend, not realizing anything is unusual about his feelings, his friend turns on him and word spreads at school that Trevor is gay ("Dear Diary: Today I practiced my funeral. It's been that kind of day"). Shortly thereafter, a confused Trevor is ostracized by all of his friends. In his ensuing pain, he attempts to give himself electric shocks to reverse his apparent homosexuality, runs away from home, and ultimately attempts real suicide while lip-syncing to "Endless Love." With humor and heartfelt emotion, Trevor deals with the issues that every gay child must suffer through, usually alone, and shows the hope that *almost* all of us eventually find. Luckily, Trevor finds his hope. A *(DJR)*

*Raleigh Studios is at 5300 Melrose Avenue in Hollywood. Admission is $7, or $4 for American Cinematheque members. For tickets, call THEATIX at 213.466.1767. For further information (*not *tickets) call 213.466.FILM.*

4-FRONT MAGAZINE

FLICKS

American Cinematheque

Presents Award-Winning Gay and Lesbian Films

There are 31 talk shows still on the air. Topics that range from "my transsexual roommate stole my boyfriend" to "I was kidnapped by homosexual extraterrestrials." With so many talking head programs about human sexuality, who needs to go out and see normal films about African American gay siblings, a gay teenager's attempt at suicide or an abstract film on machismo?

In contrast to the flood of talk shows' exploiting homosexuals, the American Cinematheque will present a screening of gay films on the previously mentioned topics. These award-winning films provide a window into the multi-cultural world of gays and lesbians, minus the sensationalism and extraterrestrials. The program is entitled "The Alternative Screen: A Forum for Independent Film Exhibition and Beyond" scheduled for May 9th at the Raleigh Studios' Charlie Chaplin Theatre in Hollywood. Unlike the tactics of talk shows that polarizes their audiences and sometimes grandstand their guests, independently produced documentaries and film shorts remain a valuable source of information and entertainment about gays and lesbians.

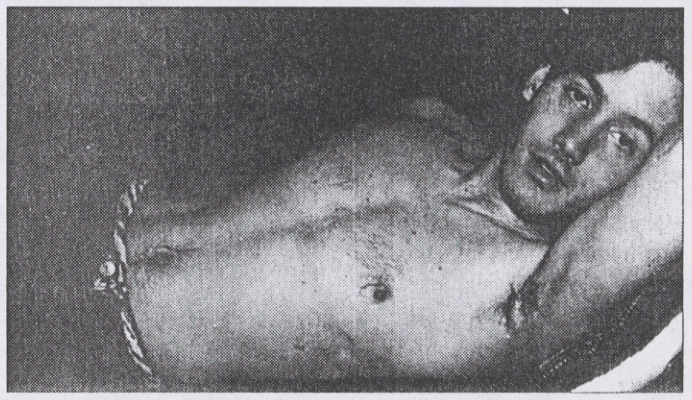
Thomas Allen Harris' film *Vintage: Families of Value* (72 min) kicks off the program with an examination on the psychic space of the family, as seen through the eyes of three sets of African American, gay and lesbian siblings—including the filmmaker and his younger brother. The documentary, however, is not just a video family album. Harris has chosen to break away from the traditional documentary format and combine talking heads with performance art, dance, ritual and even allows the subjects to operate the camera themselves in order for them to probe for answers they need to discuss/debate within each family. The result is a poetic, lyrical, self-reflexive style of filmmaking.

In an interview with Harris, an assistant professor at the University of California, San Diego, the filmmaker stressed the need for the subjects to be in control of their representation. "I felt it necessary to let the siblings reclaim their identities and reconstruct their histories without interference from a third party," said Harris. "I gave them technical lessons in lighting, camera operation, and sound, but then, I left the room." The siblings examine their lives as gay African Americans, reflecting back when their parents tried conforming them into strict gender roles.

In another thematic thread woven into *Vintage* is the revelation of self-hatred that caused several of the siblings to act out cruelly towards their younger gay siblings. In a poem, Harris apologizes to his brother Lyle (who has been diagnosed as HIV+). "My rejection of you mirrored the rejection I felt from Daddy. Daddy would dump on me and I would dump on you because of certain feminine stuff. I know it would hurt you because at school they called you 'faggot.'"

Harris, a one man production crew, spent five years and less than $100,000 creating this thought provoking family portrait. For this filmmaker's first feature length endeavor, his perseverance has paid off. *Vintage* has already picked up two awards on the film festival circuit including San Francisco's Golden Gate Award and Best Documentary Award at the Atlanta Images Festival. *Vintage* also will be theatrically released nationwide in September, 1996, giving Harris a well-deserved shot at an Academy Award for best documentary.

After *Vintage*, the screening of Gay and Lesbian short films will begin at 9:15 PM. *Trevor* (18 mins.), Peggy Rajiski's Oscar winner for 1994's Best Short Film, revolves around a gay teen-age boy who identifies with pop diva Diana Ross because "she went through a lot of prejudices" as a black woman. The teen realizes that he will face similar obstacles as an effeminate, gay, white boy. Trevor's profound foreshadowing statement, however, cannot prepare the precocious 13 year old to the cruel homophobic behavior that soon develops around him. Some of Ross's best melodies enrich this bittersweet narrative and Rajiski's direction creates a sensitive story about a child who is fully aware of his sexual desires and homophobic surroundings.



Other films screened for the Forum include Michael Wallin's *Black Sheep Boy* (1995, 37 mins.) (pictured above) is a lyrical short film on the fixation some older men have on younger men. With lots of jump cutting of naked, white boys and poetic stanzas, *Black Sheep Boy* resembles Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* with its avant-garde style of perpetual adoration of the male physique. The most disappointing piece of all the short films is *Cheap Flight*, by Kevin Duffy. It is a pretentious tale of "morning after" blues with two guys and a girl who are craving for bagels. Just be thankful it is only five minutes long. Jay Rosenblatt's short film, *The Smell of Burning Ants* (1994, 21 mins) is a provocative abstract piece on machismo and the socialized behavior modification of boys. Rosenblatt juxtaposes black and white stock footage of young boys at play. A monotone voice over accompanies the stock footage, describing how boys learn to be sadists at a very young age. The toddlers start out burning ants, slugs, butterflies and then graduate onto killing bunnies, birds, and finally escalating to mentally torturing weaker males. (This film could be re-titled: *A Requiem For Jeffery Dahmer*). Closing the event will be Joshua Rosenzweig's *Teen Scream Team* which stars drag diva Jackie Beat (Kent Fuher) and dragster Sherry Vine. Three chubby, teenage girls are out to have fun at a slumber party, despite a serial killer who's on the prowl and has an insatiable appetite for chunky-dunk girls.

The American Cinematheque has thoughtfully put together a program with overlapping themes of socialized and internalized homophobia, an introspection of gender roles, and the celebration of homoeroticism. Directors Thomas Allen Harris, Barbara Rose Michels, Joshua Rosenzweig, and performer Jackie Beat will be present for discussion following the evening's program. Admission for the general public is $7.00 and $4.00 for American Cinematheque members. Tickets to the Forum can be purchased through THEATIX (213) 466-1767. - **Joseph Castel**

LOS ANGELES TIMES
MONDAY, MAY 6, 1996

SCREENING ROOM

By KEVIN THOMAS
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Vibrant Beauty: The American Cinematheque's Alternative Screen series presents Thomas Ethan Harris' **"Vintage: Families of Values"** Thursday at 7 p.m. at Raleigh Studios (5300 Melrose Ave.).

Harris spent about five years making this vibrant account of the experiences of three sets of gay African American siblings, starting with himself and his younger brother, Lyle; three sisters, one bisexual, the other two lesbian; and a gay brother and lesbian sister.

Harris touches on racism only when he speculates on its impact on his long-estranged, macho ex-Marine father, and he doesn't delve into theories concerning the origins of homosexuality. He instead concentrates primarily on the ebb and flow of sibling relationships in his lyrical film, punctuated by fantasies and performance sequences.

The specters of AIDS, sexual abuse and other issues emerge in the conversational give-and-take. No matter how volatile the talk becomes, the underlying love between these people is palpable and possibly has even been strengthened by their participation in this film—for example, the gay brother becomes more accepting of his lesbian sister's "mannishness" (her own description of herself).

The 72-minute "Vintage" is a beautiful, heartfelt film with a tonic effect.

Playing with it is Jay Rosenblatt's 21-minute **"The Smell of Burning Ants,"** a profoundly disturbing and imaginative work in which Rosenblatt uses vintage footage to suggest that much of the violence in American society comes from men becoming systematically detached from their emotions from early childhood.

These films will be followed by a program of short films. Among them are Kevin Duffy's witty five-minute **"Cheap Flight,"** in which two gay men and their straight female friend, suffering a romantic setback, wake up in the same bed after a night of partying.

Michael Wallin's 37-minute **"Black Sheep Boy"** is a celebration of the beauty of young men and a meditation upon the meaning and consequences of desire; it's highly sensual, contains much nudity but is not hard-core. Barbara Rose Michels' clever six-minute **"Watching Her Sleep"** finds a young woman fantasizing romantically about a drop-dead gorgeous woman in a market checkout line. But is it a fantasy—or a painful chance encounter with a former lover?

The program's standout, not surprisingly, is Peggy Rajski's Oscar-winning 18-minute **"Trevor,"** which confronts with a jaunty affection the horrors of puberty for gay males.

Information: (213) 466-FILM.

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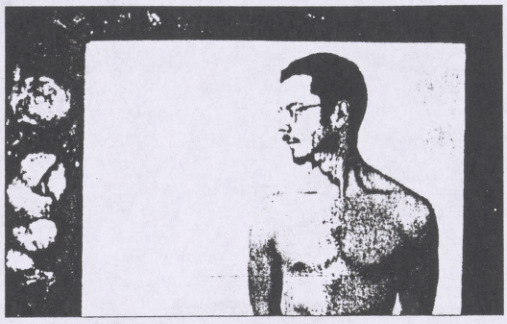

SCENES FROM BLACK SHEEP BOY

Little Lost Lambs

Peter Bowen on the films of Michael Wallin

Towards the beginning of Michael Wallin's 1988 experimental film, *Decodings*, a male voiceover informs us: "This is a story. There is isolation and brotherhood. Desperation and hope. A heart is laid bare. There is blood. A man leaps from an airplane. Danger. It is not a story for the timid." In the film, composed entirely of appropriated industrial footage, we eventually encounter these things — there is a parachuter and a shot of open-heart surgery — although never as we might have imagined them. Wallin's new film, *Black Sheep Boy*, which recently screened at the Berlin Film Festival, creates a similar division between the image and the imagination. Here the filmmaker uses the muted, objectified images of young men to explore his own imagination, that of a heart laid bare. This too is not a story for the timid.

Since 1968 Wallin has made 14 experimental or "personal" films that extend a filmmaking tradition made famous by such mentors as Stan Brakhage, Kenneth Anger and Barbara Hammer. But unlike these artists, whose work is often best remembered by a signature style — Brakhage's shallow-focused and hand-altered film, Anger's homoerotic and sadistic montage or Hammer's exploration of the lesbian body and gaze — Wallin often reinvents his aesthetic with each new project. His 1976 *The Place Between Our Bodies*, set in the heyday of San Francisco's gay hedonism, provided what was then a radical challenge to gay sexuality by placing the domestic joys of a relationship next to the endless pleasures of promiscuity. While the film's flickering light and shaky camera make it seem more like a home movie than an artistic achievement, his crude aesthetic now appears unpredictably appropriate to the story's pioneering spirit.

Wallin's 1988 *Decodings* transformed the art world's ironic, sometimes smug, postmodern strategy of appropriation into a lyrical exploration of, as he puts it, "the possibilities for and the barriers to intimacy [between men]." Orchestrating found footage from docs of the '40s and '50s, a mournful Shostakovich score and anecdotal and pseudo-scientific voiceovers, the film could easily appear, if it were not for one interruption ("I placed my mouth over his already hard cock"), to have nothing to do with gay sexuality. But in the context of the lesbian and gay film festivals in which it was often shown, the film's bewildering mix of images and sound took hold of the imagination. Many left the theater feeling an inexplicable sense of loss, remembering those friends dead from AIDS.

In *Black Sheep Boy*, Wallin taps into our current cultural fascination with adolescence and pornography, a trend evidenced by Calvin Klein's controversial porn interview ads and Larry Clark's teen fantasy, *Kids*. But there is nothing opportunistic about Wallin's fascination with young flesh. The origins of his film began over three years ago when a love affair with Nic, a member of the High Risk Group whose dance performances appear intermittingly throughout the film, went bad. Left to his own desires, Wallin started to question his behavior and desire. "I realized that it was something that I had done before. I had a pattern for falling for younger men."

Rather than rely on professional actors, Wallin sought out boys who entranced him. He made up a business card that he handed to potential candidates who caught his eye. According to Wallin, "Once a boy seemed interested I would legitimize myself through press clippings. Then we would set up a photo shoot to see how he looked on film, but also to gain his trust. If that went well we would arrange to shoot him. I have to admit that I did end up in bed with two or three of the boys, but I was always very respectful of their limits. I was walking a fine line." Indeed the cast includes neither boys nor teens, but rather young men who display a certain boyish quality.

The final product is deceptively simple. Straightforward scenes of young men in various locales (beaches, back lots, abandoned playgrounds, unassuming apartment bedrooms) edited together in a stacatto manner that continually changes focal length. For Wallin, "the style is almost cubist, creating a composite portrait of each person." But these continually changing shots also suggest — especially in relation to the film's almost predatory shooting style — a hint of self-consciousness, as if the camera was continually blinking or turning away from what it could not otherwise keep its eyes off of. In addition, Wallin has included small staged performances by the High Risk Group, which, while out of character with everything else in the film, offer a sort of counterpoint — an alternative voice — to the boys who are everywhere else silent.

Over these images is original music composed by Erik Walker (who scored Jay Rosenblatt's *The Smell of Burning Ants*) and a voiceover text by Stephen Beachy, a novelist who *The Celluloid Closet*'s Rob Epstein introduced Wallin to after Epstein and his partner had considered optioning Beachy's novel *The Whistling Song*. Joining the project late, Beachy worked from Wallin's diaries and autobiographical writings to create hypnotic and poetic vignettes that Wallin and he assigned to scenes already shot, a tactic that seems to heighten the film's already deeply personal and voyeuristic sensibility.

Both for financial and creative reasons, Wallin's work evolves slowly. Begun in 1991, *Black Sheep Boy* was financed through grants from the NEA, AFI and PBS. To support himself, Wallin also teaches lesbian and gay film history at San Francisco City College and works as a clinical psychologist.

Attempting "to pursue a personal vision whatever that vision might be," the material for Wallin's films is as rich, varied, and often as difficult to comprehend, as his own life and desires. ▼

SF Weekly

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Volume 14, Number 35

Film

Movie Capsules

(☛ points to recommended films. Critics: Michael Arago (M.A.), Michael Fox (M.F.), William O. Goggins (W.G.), Glen Helfand (G.H.), Johnny Ray Huston (J.R.H.), Daniel Mangin (D.M.), Sia Michel (S.M.), Paul Reidinger (P.R.), John Sullivan (J.S.). See Showtime (p. 36) for theater information and times.

Opening

☛ ***Black Sheep Boy*** Local director Michael Wallin's latest film ruminates on desire, specifically the lure of a particular type of young man — "boyish, innocent, not too pretty, not too tall, not too skinny, not too muscular ... all this with some character." The form here — pulsing, layered imagery intercut with longer, more voyeuristic shots — well suits the content, which includes a voice-over that analyzes the fantasy Wallin's camera describes. On the surface, *Black Sheep Boy* might appear to stereotype gay men as sex obsessed — and with youth at that. But Wallin accomplishes something deeper: He presents a thinking, feeling human being on a quest for self-knowledge. *Boy* has links to experimental classics such as Jean Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour* and Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks*, but addresses the philosophical and psychological implications of sexual yearning more directly. Two early works, ***Sleepwalk*** (1973) and *Along the Way* (1983), are on the bill with the 37-minute *Boy*. The filmmaker will attend an Oct. 15 S.F. Cinematheque retrospective. Among the films to be screened is Wallin's lyrical ***Decodings*** (1988), an assemblage of found footage — educational films, documentaries — into a science-fictionlike meditation on the messages encoded in media artifacts. (D.M.) *S.F. Art Institute*

The House on Haunted Hill B-movie producer/director William Castle's gimmicky 1959 bone-chiller about a demented millionaire (Vincent Price) and his deadly mansion. Filmed in Emergo!, a special process "more startling than 3-D." Warning: Beware of flying plastic skeletons! *Castro*

Jade See review in this issue. *Century Plaza, Geneva Drive-In, Regency II, Century 8, Piedmont, UA Emery Bay, California*

Persuasion Merchant-Ivory it isn't. All but the most assiduous Jane Austen acolytes will likely find this BBC-produced version of the author's last novel to be bordering on bleak. Director Roger Michell emphasizes the shadows and somber sitting rooms of early 19th-century England — a decidedly different view for audiences accustomed to the bright, lushly photographed epics of a recently Anglophilic Hollywood. Amanda Root plays the melancholy heroine, Anne, to painful perfection. Ciaran Hinds is likewise moody and brooding as her scorned suitor, Capt. Wentworth. Only the expectation that these fate-jinxed lovers will reunite in the end makes this grim romance tolerable. Corin Redgrave provides comic relief with his vulgar version of Sir Walter Elliot; Phoebe Nicholls also breathes humor into Anne's sour, spoiled sister, Elizabeth. (J.S.) *Bridge*

The Scarlet Letter Demi Moore and Roland Joffe take a few liberties with Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel about adulterous young Hester Prynne, adding nude baths, nude swims, romantic horseback rides, and a happy ending. Hester gets to shoot a gun, too! Co-starring Gary Oldman as Hester's Harlequin Romance hunk-of-a-lover, and Robert Duvall as her crabby, spoilsport hubby. *Century Plaza, Regency I, Century 8, Piedmont, UA Emery Bay, Shattuck*

Strange Days It's New Year's Eve, 1999. Seventies retro is still in, pandemonium rules the city, and a new drug has hit the streets: It's a virtual-reality device called "the wire," and it allows users to experience other people's lives. L.A.'s biggest dealer of "clips" (cerebral cortex recordings of other people's experiences) is Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes), a burned-out ex-cop who has sampled a bit too much of his own product. Had screenwriter James Cameron and director Kathryn Bigelow stuck with the above premise, they might have made an interesting tech-noir thriller (à la *Blade Runner*). But Bigelow opts for a hopelessly overwrought epic weighed down by a frivolous political subtext involving racial tensions, racist cops, and boring millennium mumbo jumbo rolled into a nonstop action picture. She diverts our attention with a jarring soundtrack; a writhing and scantily clad Juliette Lewis (who also sings two songs just to further torment those who already can't stand her vacant screen presence); lots of bloodshed and pyrotechnics; and a series of rape scenes. Shamelessly ripping off films as disparate as *Brainstorm* and *Peeping Tom*, Cameron's tired script ultimately ruins whatever momentum Bigelow has created with her relentless pace. Co-starring Tom Sizemore and Angela Bassett. (M.A.) *Coronet, Geneva Drive-In, UA Colma, Grand Lake, UA Emery Bay, UA Berkeley*

The Stranger Indian director Satyajit Ray's final film, a 1992 drama about a bourgeois family and a stranger who claims to be their relative; part of a retrospective of Ray's work. *Embarcadero*

Bay Area Reporter

VOL. XXV No. 23 June 8, 1995 395 NINTH ST., SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103

'The Naked Look'

Under Western Eyes

by Roberto Friedman

Local filmmaker Michael Wallin's "Black Sheep Boy" is the highlight of *The Naked Look,* a San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival program of short works concerned with the voyeuristic gaze. Wallin's 16mm film is a poetic meditation on his driving attraction to young men, the kind of boys the Festival program promotes as "barely legal" but who seem, on closer inspection, to be well into their twenties, if still flush with the beauty of youth. You may even find, as I did, some familiar faces among them.

Like lyrical segments of Genet's "Chant d'Amour," the scenes of guys undressing in "Black Sheep Boy" are refreshingly unencumbered by a plot. Instead, a man's voice serves as the guiding consciousness of the film as he describes his fetishizing of these youths, admitting that he is after a fantasy, not a reality. He conjures up an

Continued on page 38

From "Black Sheep Boy" by Michael Wallin.

'Naked Look'

Continued from cover

ideal boyman, full of "sexual vitality, maddeningly self-involved, irresponsible, incapable of really giving." Later he cops to seeking "my younger self."

The beauty of this film goes beyond the visual splendor of youth. Wallin's technique preserves multiple takes of the same subject: this stuttering tempo, combined with bursts of flash and the candid quality of the posing, gives the film a rough, underground look that's very appealing and appropriate to its grunge mileau.

Some footage of the now-defunct High Risk Group, intercut throughout, serves only to distract. The study of movement may be quite apt in describing how men interact physically, but the scenes of High Risk dancing really deserve to be in another film.

Because the soundtrack is independent of the visuals, Wallin is able to make some good sonic jokes, such as a nifty popping sound whenever a guy undoes that first button of his jeans. "Black Sheep Boy" celebrates that uncorking with eroticism, philosophy and poetry.

If only the balance of *The Naked Look* program were so inspired. Ken Anderlini's "Tangled Garden, Act II, Scene II" purports to be an interpretation of erotic male nudes in art history. Live models pose in front of projections of classic paintings. The exercise only proves that art suffers in reproduction. (By virtue of a dubbing snafu by Frameline, I also screened Anderlini's "Tangled Garden, Act *I,* Scene II," which turned out to be an artsy take on the domestic history of the Jersey cow. Certain scenes of milking I found more visually absorbing, and potentially erotic, than the segment chosen for the Festival.)

And José Torrealba's "Limites" is a long visit to the studio of Peruvian photographer Carlos Quiroz, who lovingly shoots film of toothsome French-Canadian male models who have lots to offer, stripped down and oiled up. There sure is a lot of eye candy up on the screen as we are party to these photo sessions, and this may be enough for most of the intended audience. But before too long, Quiroz's voice-over sharing his ideas about pornography and eroticism sags, and the secondary voyeurism of watching him take pictures of naked men doesn't sustain the video's 47-minute length. ▼

The Naked Look **plays at the Victoria Theater on Saturday, June 10 at 10:15pm.**

SAN FRANCISCO
Bay Times
VOLUME 18 • NUMBER 3 • OCT 31, 1996
$1 OUTSIDE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA
THE GAY/LESBIAN/BI/TRANS NEWSPAPER & EVENTS CALENDAR FOR THE BAY AREA

Film

ISO Black Sheep Boy

BY JOSE GUEVARA

Young, boyish, innocent, not too pretty, not too cute, not too classically handsome, sexy, without too much self-consciousness, not too tall, not too skinny, not too muscular, not too hairy, hung.

"Start with a type," suggests the voice in Michael Wallin's experimental personal film, *Black Sheep Boy* (playing at the Roxie Cinema, Monday, Nov. 4; 7 & 9 pm). This poetic short film follows a non-traditional, non-linear approach to independent San Francisco filmmaking that often titillates the mainstream with alluring visions of queers, and also angers right-wing Christian men. Using a format that seemingly resembles a series of Calvin Klein TV ads for jeans, Wallin's film wanders into numerous settings from an adolescent fantasy by an older predatory, voyeuristic man.

Depending on which side of lens or screen you are viewing, *Black Sheep Boy* can be interpreted from several different angles—as a viewer or the view, in the frame or out of it altogether. However, the range of types in this film is limited to cute white boys in jockeys and intercut with unexpected, and sometimes mismatched, contact improv performance by San Francisco dance company, High Risk Group. This interesting juxtaposition presents a few examples of how familiar the style of this 1995 film looks on the surface. From the pages of *Details'* spreads to the hyper-media of MTV, the black sheep boy is a marketable type. This queer type of film has the look of youth that is so seductive to mainstream advertisers to sell the newest cultural products and positions before the original film has even been completed. Somewhere in this mainstream barrage of making gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender types visible, the media has obscured the personal experience of homosexual desire and identity. Once stolen from the source, these gay images are conveniently appropriated and diffused.

Bad boy

Funded from numerous public sources, including grants from the NEA, PBS, and Film Arts Foundation, *Black Sheep Boy* is a testament to the creation of independent and experimental films. To some, the passive submission of these boys could be considered a crime. At least before the days of Stonewall, when "queer" meant disease of desire, *Black Sheep Boy* might only have been seen in some secret back room. Nonetheless, the explicit nature of desire seen here is still enough to scare public television.

There is a lingering feeling in this film that desire is embedded with a sense of deep sadness and loss—the close-up smiles, snapshot poses, memories of bedroom scenes or a walk on the beach. These boys are angels from a projected youth that may not necessarily reflect your own, but is part of the generic GWM culture that gays celebrate and love to hate.

So what really lies behind these portraits? Compulsive obsession, control, romantic detachment. From the perspective of a personal ad, *Black Sheep Boy* documents the process of meeting boys and their qualities of desire. Who is Wallin in this film?

These are not reflections on view, but rather, stylized and manipulated role-playing fantasies. Wallin's personal film uses text by Stephen Beachy and an original score by Erik Walker to weave his romantic illusions of his encounters with his subjects. His existential view recalls some Beatnik vision of youth superimposed over scenes from AMG physique films of the late 1950s and '60s.

Back to the boys, the models, It seems that fetish and passion go hand in hand with the consensual game that is being played between the director and subjects, the audience and the image on film. Who are the sheep and who is the wolf? ▼

Bay Bre A. Re R. rter

VOL. XXV No. 41 October 12, 1995 395 NINTH ST., SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94103

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FILM

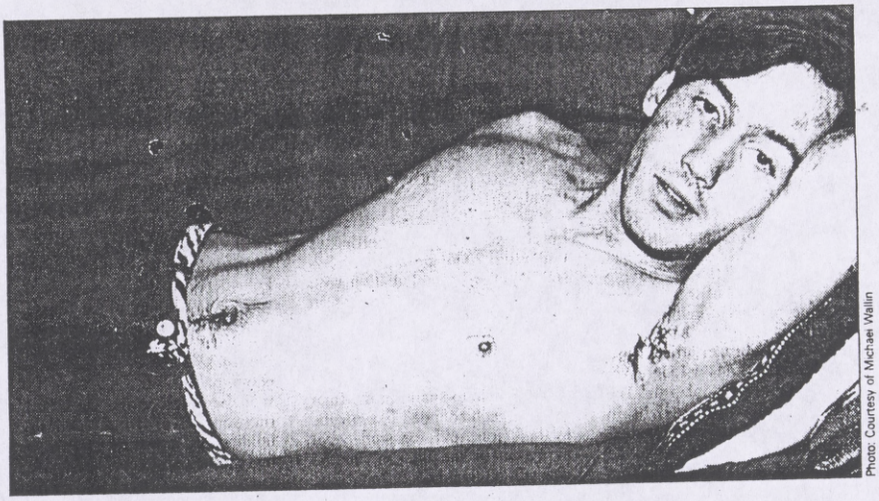

Photo: Courtesy of Michael Wallin

Black Sheep Boy

Michael Wallin's *Black Sheep Boy*

Inside Desire

by David Lamble

Michael Wallin's *Black Sheep Boy* is the hardest soft-core film to flicker before my eyes in quite a while. In the film, Wallin, a Bay Area experimental filmmaker for more than 25 years, explores the uneasy relationship between an artistic voyeur and a younger generation of sexy subjects. While this crew of tasty San Francisco twenty-somethings is hardly jailbait, they do embody the frisky playfulness of gay adolescence.

The inspiration for *Black Sheep Boy* grew out of the filmmaker's infatuation with a young dancer. When the subject dropped out of the film in progress, Wallin decided to broaden his inspection of the emotional interaction between older and younger gay men to include a cast of a dozen, including members of the High Risk dance company.

Wallin eroticizes the space between his camera and the boy/men, between them and the viewer, and even between the various uniforms they remove and the man/child bodies underneath. As a voice-over narration points out, to obsess about someone it is necessary to observe them from a distance, not to get to know them too well, for too much knowledge can break the spell. The secret is a kind of subjective objectification: getting close, but not penetrating the mysterious barrier that divides the body desired from the specific qualities of the individual personality or soul lurking within.

One way Wallin achieves this is to pose his subjects in the manner of a typical porno spread. He short circuits the usual visual clichés, however, with a jumpy camera and editing style that disrupts the view of bare young skin. The accompanying musical score lends further power to a poetic narration that, at its best, echoes early Dennis Cooper.

Some may find watching *Black Sheep Boy* disturbing, even a little creepy. At certain points, the effect for the viewer is akin to taking on the role of the Jimmy Stewart character in *Rear Window* – we feel guilty about watching, but, are too compelled to turn away. Wallin reveals to us the disgust that can lurk beneath desire.

A sample of *Black Sheep Boy*'s philosophy comes in an early passage, read as a young man lounges on a bed in a South of Market flat. "I'm not as shallow as it seems. It's not just the surfaces, the skin, and hair and eyes. Everything that already exists is inevitably a disappointment, even beauty and everything underneath it. Death hides that fact, pretends to be the real tragedy, when the real tragedy is boredom and the loss of desire."

Most gay men who see *Black Sheep Boy* will likely come away impressed by the strength of its imagery, though it may leave them feeling slightly uncomfortable as well. ▼

***Black Sheep Boy* plays with other films of Michael Wallin on Sunday, October 15 at 7:30 p.m. at the San Francisco Cinematheque of the San Francisco Art Institute (800 Chestnut St.) in San Francisco.**

Michael Wallin

BLACK SHEEP BOY (1995) 37 min. 16mm/color/sound $75 rental
[videotape sale price: $60 individuals; $90 intstitutions]

A rumination on desire, the construction of sexual fantasy, obsession, and the yearning for connection--physical and emotional. The film examines the allure of the younger man and the pursuit of the idealized other, its rewards and pitfalls. Wallin indulges in his fantasy as he proceeds to deconstruct it, exploring the relationship between subject and object, artist and model--who is in control, who holds the power? Erotic, playful, perhaps disturbing, many questions are raised, few are answered.

"Like lyrical segments of Genet's CHANT D'AMOUR, the scenes of guys undressing in BLACK SHEEP BOY are refreshingly unencumbered by a plot. Instead, a man's voice serves as the guiding consciousness of the film as he describes his fetishizing of these youths, admitting that he is after a fantasy, not a reality...The beauty of this film goes beyond the visual splendor of youth. Wallin's technique preserves multiple takes of the same subject: this stuttering tempo, combined with bursts of flash and the candid quality of the posing, gives the film a rough, underground look that's very appealing and appropriate to its grunge milieu...Because the soundtrack is independent of the visuals, Wallin is able to make some good sonic jokes, such as a nifty popping sound whenever a guy undoes that first button of his jeans. BLACK SHEEP BOY celebrates that uncorking with eroticism, philosophy and poetry." --Roberto Friedman, "Bay Area Reporter"

"One of the best shorts making the '95 gay film-fest circuit is Michael Wallin's BLACK SHEEP BOY...Wallin presents a thinking, feeling human being who's seeking self-knowledge...Artistically, BLACK SHEEP BOY has links to experimental classics such as Jean Genet's UN CHANT D'AMOUR and Kenneth Anger's FIREWORKS but addresses the philosophical and psychological implications of desire more directly." --Daniel Mangin, "Wilde"

Shown: San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, Vancouver Lesbian & Gay Film/Video Festival, Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, Austin Gay & Lesbian International Film Festival, Film Arts Festival (San Francisco), MIX '95 (New York Int'l Lesbian/Gay Film/Video Festival), Chicago Lesbian/Gay Int'l Film Festival, Montreal Int'l Gay/Lesbian Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival, London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival

cinematheque

BLACK SHEEP BOY
AND OTHER FILMS BY MICHAEL WALLIN

Michael Wallin In Person

Sunday October 15, 1995 San Francisco Art Institute

Michael Wallin's first one-person screening in seven years at the San Francisco Cinematheque highlights the completion of his long awaited new film *Black Sheep Boy*, a poetic rumination on desire, the construction of sexual fantasy, and the pursuit of the idealized other. Tonight's show is also an opportunity to revisit several of Wallin's earlier works, including the award-winning *Decodings*.

Michael Wallin has been making films in the Bay Area for 25 years. His involvement in the film community has included an eight-year stint as Manager of Canyon Cinema, the country's largest distributor of independently-produced experimental work, and eight years on its Board of Directors. He has taught film production and theory at California College of Arts and Crafts, and is currently President of the Board of the San Francisco Cinematheque. In 1988 Wallin received the James D. Phelan Art Award in Filmmaking for the body of his work, and his film *Decodings* was chosen for the Biennial Exhibition of the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1989. In order to make *Black Sheep Boy*, he received major production grants to artists from the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Film Institute as well as a grant from the Independant Television Service (ITVS). In addition to making films, Wallin also works as a psychotherapist at Fort Help Counseling Agency and has a private practice.

Along the Way (1983); 16mm, color, sound, 20 minutes

The third film in a trilogy of related works that includes *Monitoring the Unstable Earth* and *Fearful Symmetry*, *Along the Way* addresses the function of topography as perceived through landscape and cityscape. However, while the previous films move toward abstraction, *Along the Way* centers itself on people, events and the experiential aspects of space. Taking the form of a travelogue or diary film, it chronicles the activities of leisure time, while focusing them through the analytic lens of formalist structure. Finished during the dissolution of a ten-year relationship, the film contains the emotional residue of that event, playing with a deliberate sentimentality or nostalgia for things past.

Sleepwalk (1973); 16mm, color, sound, 12 minutes

Sleepwalk, one of the first films Wallin finished while attending film school, grew out of an interest in the Russian mystic philosophers Gurdjieff and Ouspensky and their theories concerning the expression of personality through personal mannerisms, gesture and nuances of behavior. In his film Wallin deconstructs the physical expressions that characterize three of his friends, examining the process by which these idiosyncracies delineate the specificity of personality.

Decodings (1988); 16mm, b&w, sound, 15 minutes

The mystery of life is being here with you. The mystery is being with your absence. This is a story. There is isolation and brotherhood. Desperation and hope. A heart is laid bare. There is blood. A man leaps from an airplane. Danger. It is not a story for the timid.

— from the script of *Decodings*

"While I was editing the film I began to realize that my choice of material reflected concerns that seemed almost 'autobiographical.' The film evolved into a sort of emotional/psychological/sexual self-portrait. I wrote a piece for the film as a narration, but it was too naked. I gave it to a writer friend with instructions to create vignettes and characters to carry the thematic material. He did, creating a series of anecdotes, parables and pseudo-scientific musings to accompany the images and the music of Shostakovich. The film deals with the issues of the kinds of relationships that can exist between males and the possibilities for and the barriers to intimacy. It is concerned with the struggle to break through family/cultural expectations and role-playing to express true individuality and experience true freedom." (MW)

"*Decodings* is a profoundly moving, allegorical search for identity from the documents of collective memory, in this case found footage from the '40s and '50s . The search for self ends in aching poignancy with stills of a boy and his mother at the kitchen table, catching the moment that marks the dawning of anguish and loss; desire becomes imprinted on that which was long ago."

— Manohla Dargis, *Village Voice*

Black Sheep Boy (1995); 16mm, color, sound, 37 minutes

Michael Wallin's most recent film, *Black Sheep Boy*, explicitly addresses his experience of his own sexuality and the way that it has structured and responded to desire, especially as expressed through voyeurism. Although the visual element of the film consists predominately of intimately photographed nude or partially clothed young men, as a text it maintains a studied distance from these men, allowing for their presence only as the objects of its gaze, which the spoken text implicitly identifies as that of the filmmaker. This position of identification with the gaze of the camera emphasizes its function as a probing tool, one which allows for examination and dissection but stymies the maturation of desire into identification with its object. However, while the visual object of desire remains external, the subject of examination and point of intimate revelation attaches itself to the voice of the text, that of the filmmaker, and the features that characterize the specificity of his desire. In this way, the true intimate subject of the film becomes explicitly located in the disembodied corpus of the text itself, and so not only functions as an exegesis of desire and its problematics as expressed in this one individual, but also implicates the spectator in that critical evaluation, its revelation demanding reciprocation.

"On the surface, *Black Sheep Boy* might appear to stereotype gay men as sex obsessed—and with youth at that. But Wallin accomplishes something deeper: he presents a thinking, feeling human being on a quest for self-knowledge. *Boy* has links to experimental classics such as Jean Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour* and Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks*, but addresses the philosophical and psychological implications of sexual yearning more directly." —Daniel Mangin, *S.F. Weekly*

Filmography

Black Sheep Boy (1995)
Decodings (1988)
Along the Way (1983)
Fearful Symmetry (1981)
Monitoring the Unstable Earth (1980)
Cool Runnings (1980)
Tall Grass (1980)
Greed, or Buffalo Baba (1972/1980)
The Place Between Our Bodies (1976)
Sleepwalk (1973)
As the Wheel Turns (1973)
Kali's Revue (1972)
Mendocino (1968)
Phoebe and Jan (1968)

• program notes written / compiled by Brian Frye •